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SUBJECT: POLITICAL ISLAM -- GAUGING HARD-LINE INFLUENCE IN  
KEY MUSLIM GROUPS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesia's two largest mass Muslim organizations--Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)--are reportedly having success in mitigating the influence of hard-line radicals in their ranks. Muhammadiyah is probably the more susceptible of the two organizations to radical infiltration due to its urban links and general philosophy; NU is less a target. Over all--given the influence of the two groups--it is natural that radicals want to gain a foothold, but, so far, their influence remains minimal. Some commentators have observed a "conservative drift," however, in the two groups toward Sunni orthodoxy and personal piety. END SUMMARY.

#### ON GUARD AGAINST RADICALISM

¶2. (C) NU, with about 40 million members, and Muhammadiyah, with about 35 million, are the largest mass Muslim organizations in Indonesia and, by some counts, the world. Both groups have long been on guard against radical influences. In recent conversations with poloff, for example, youth and student leaders from the two organizations cited the growing influence of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a small radical group. HTI's influence remained very limited, but NU and Muhammadiyah wanted to make sure that the group--which wants to create an international "Caliphate"--does not pick up influence.

¶3. (SBU) This concern with radical "infiltration" remains high, despite polling data released earlier this month by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI)--a reputable local firm--which shows that the appeal of radical groups in Indonesia has declined gradually over the past three years. The survey indicates both an increase in awareness of and a decrease in support for hard-line organizations such as HTI and the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI). It also reveals a steep drop in support for viewpoints espoused by extremists and some conservatives. For instance, the percentage of respondents who believe a woman should not be president of Indonesia declined from 41 percent in 2005 to 22 percent in ¶2007.

#### MUHAMMADIYAH'S STEPS

¶4. (C) Muhammadiyah leaders admit that they have needed to work assiduously to curb radical elements. According to

commentators, Muhammadiyah is probably the more susceptible of the two organizations to radical infiltration due to its urban links and generally "modernist" philosophy. Markus Sudibyo, an important Muhammadiyah leader, told Pol/C recently that radicalism was "always" a problem, but "one which we are having success controlling and combating." For example, Muhammadiyah earlier this year completed an internal review that revealed the extent to which its Youth members also affiliate with radical groups. Youth Secretary General, Gunawan Hidayat told poloff that dual affiliation was a serious issue and noted that some members whose loyalties were "doubted" had been "purged" from the group. While some radicals clearly remained in the organization, they had little influence on policy and their numbers did not seem to be increasing, Hidayat concluded.

NU -- LESS CONCERNS

15. (C) NU seems less worried about radicalism. The Secretary General of NU, Student Movement (PMII), Hery Haryanto Azumi, told poloff he was not overly concerned with the possible infiltration of his organization by groups like HTI.

While Muhammadiyah shared and competed for the same urban base as HTI and the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), NU was predominantly rural. He also noted that the radical threat to NU was mitigated by the strength of its pesantren (Islamic school) network, which served as a bulwark against non-mainstream influences by providing students with a firm grounding in Islamic ideas.

16. (C) Nevertheless, PMII is working to develop the public relation skills of its cadre to spread the "mainstream message." According to Azumi, hard-line groups have worked

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to exploit their media and public affairs advantage over the traditionally less agile mass Muslim organizations. PMII aims to incorporate these skills into NU, pesantren education so that graduates can better champion the cause of moderate Islam at the university level--where groups like HTI and KAMMI, PKS, student wing--have expanded rapidly. Unlike Muhammadiyah, NU does not intend to block its members from holding "dual" or alternate political affiliations. Instead it is working to create a political commission that will advise the hundreds of politicians linked to NU from different political parties on NU views, and the ways it perceives political and social matters.

CONSERVATIVE DRIFT?

17. (C) Although radicalism might be declining, both NU and Muhammadiyah contacts have admitted that the core of their membership appears to have become more conservative in a Sunni orthodox manner. NU Chairman Hasyim Muzadi has described the shift as "a natural one" for the organization, given the general direction of Islam at this time internationally. Azumi further explained that increasing attention to global political developments was at the heart of the shift within NU and the growing clout of conservatives (but not radicals) within the organization. In particular, he argued that the war in Iraq had contributed to fears that Islam was somehow under attack and had prompted many Muslims in Indonesia "to strengthen their personal defenses" with more conservative teachings. Contacts in Muhammadiyah report the same sense of conservative drift, with an accent on personal piety but not political extremism.

HUME